

Dear Clergy

Like a number of others I had a prior time and financial commitment arranged in my case nine months in advance for the day of our special synod, so I am unable to be with you as you debate this very urgent matter.

However as a member of Synod, a Board member of FCANZ which reflects the views of orthodox churches around our province and also one of your representatives to General Synod who has been in the thick of this debate for many years now I thought it incumbent upon myself to present to you my thoughts. Thoughts I would have shared at synod anyway.

So here we go.

Notes for Nelson Synod

Firstly as many have done I do want to thank the working group and Bishop Richard for a robust attempt at an almost impossible task.

At its heart what Motion 29 is trying to do is to provide a way where both sides of the theological spectrum can practice their beliefs with integrity and without fear of repercussions.

The challenge for the working group was to come up with a structural arrangement whereby two diametrically opposed theological positions could exist alongside each other with integrity. What makes this hard is that for those who want to be able to marry or bless same sex couples or for them to be eligible for ordination the task is simply one of expanding the rules. They have no problem with heterosexual marriage or the ordination of those in heterosexual marriages so a widening of the criteria of who can be married and ordained presents no problems. On the other hand for those who recognise that the bible expressly prohibits same sex relationships of any kind, any expansion of the rules actually puts them outside of scripture and means that they have to live within a system whereby the rules of the Anglican church are promoting and endorsing something that is at odds with scripture which compromises their integrity.

So the working group had to come up with a structural model that preserves that integrity. Various solutions were put to them by AFFIRM and FCANZ that would have done that like an extra provincial Diocese or a fourth Theological Tikanga. Such things do exist around the world but admittedly they require a lot of work to achieve but then as one liberal lawyer once said at General Synod. Tell us what you want and we will make it happen. Where there is a will there is a way. A more significant reason for not taking this route though is probably because it recognises that we will never agree on this issue and all of us struggle with disunity.

It is with regret that the Working Group chose not to explore those other options saying they had no mandate to do so and that such efforts would represent a departure common canon law across the communion and a departure from Lambeth resolution 72 which talks about respect for Diocesan boundaries and the authority of Bishops within those boundaries. However this ignores the fact that blessing same sex relationships also represents an even greater departure

from canon law across the communion and a departure from Lambeth resolution 1.10 which states that:

b) the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;

c) recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;

d) while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;

e) cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;

You can't have it both ways!

Instead Motion 29 recommended no change to our formularies which is our doctrine but a recommendation to allow for the blessing of same sex couples where the minister is satisfied that the relationship is loving, monogamous, faithful and the couple are committed to a life-long relationship. No minister will be forced to do this nor would a minister be disciplined for choosing to do it. To make this possible it has suggested a change to Title G, canon XIV clause 2.1 as follows:

Each Tikanga is authorised to approve forms of service not inconsistent with the Constitution / Te Pouhere, or with the Formularies of this Church except for services the use of which may be authorised pursuant to clause 8

Clause 8 allows a Bishop to authorise the use of a service of blessing for of two people, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation where the minister has satisfied him or herself that the relationship is loving, monogamous, faithful and the couple are committed to a life-long relationship.

So while our formularies are not going to be changed we are allowed to just ignore them in this particular case and for Bishops to authorise a blessing service for a relationship that could potentially include both civil marriages and civil unions as well as long term defacto relationships. Relationships which, if they involve same sex partners, are not recognised by the Bible as being rightly ordered. Furthermore there could be questions raised by some about whether even heterosexual defacto relationships and civil unions should be considered rightly ordered as well. A service that it acknowledges is inconsistent with our formularies. To be

honest I strongly doubt that such a device is legal constitutionally and it certainly could be challenged as such.

Now no one is going to be forced to do these services nor will they be disciplined for doing them but that's not the point. Our Anglican canons, our rules, are being changed to allow for something that is against the formularies the source of our doctrine. Something that is expressly not allowed is being recommended to us and if it does pass then we have the situation noted above where those who recognise that the bible expressly prohibits same sex relationships of any kind find themselves having to live within a system whereby the rules of the Anglican church are promoting and endorsing something that is at odds with scripture and which compromises their integrity accordingly.

Now there are lot's of other issues with the report. It allows for example for those who wish to bless same sex relationships to be able to teach that this is biblical without fear of sanction even when it is noted that the services that allow for this practice are inconsistent with the formularies. Now it is one thing to allow for a practice to occur when we are "undecided" but it is totally another to sanction teaching heresy (contrary to the doctrine expressed in our formularies) before the matter has been decided formally.

But ignoring the internal issues of the motion 29 report there is one more issue to consider and I find this the most compelling because it concerns the future and if you consider nothing else consider this.

If our reason for passing Motion 29 is to create a long term solution where both sides of the theological spectrum are satisfied with the status quo and can practice their beliefs without fear of church discipline or sanction then we are deluding ourselves. It will not happen. And if that was our reason for voting for motion 29 then we shouldn't do so. Motion 29 only exists because at the time General Synod did not have the will to pass Motion 30. It went too far and too soon for many. Motion 30 wanted to change our formularies to declare that same sex civil marriages blessed by the church are rightly ordered and that those in such relationships are therefore eligible for ordination.

The reason why Motion 29 is not going to create a long term solution is because the desire behind Motion 30 has not gone away, and will not go away even if we pass a watered down version of it with Motion 29. The section of the church that wants full marriage of same sex couples by the church and no bar to their ordination is still there and will continue to press for those changes. Motion 29 doesn't go far enough in their eyes and will be seen only as a stepping stone to achieving their full agenda.

Within two or four years the principles of motion 30 will be back on the table of general synod and worse by passing motion 29 we will have made their adoption easier. It's a principle of human law that new laws are adopted or existing laws are changed in response to a change in practice by society at large in this case the Anglican church. So by legislating to change our practice even in a lesser way we are in fact normalising and legitimising the behaviour and making it easier for further changes to occur in the future and with the likelihood that some orthodox voices will choose to leave with the passing of motion 29 the road to change will be even easier at General Synod. Even the report of the Motion 29 working group acknowledges this. Under the section on no change to the formularies, it intimates that we haven't arrived yet and speaks of the need for ongoing testing and debate

around the blessing of same gendered relationships which clearly indicates that this is not a closed issue for some. Indeed the Auckland synod passed a motion at their last synod to go to this years General Synod where they call upon General Synod to form a working group with the intention of reviewing the marriage canon to allow the church to marry same sex couples and for this group to report back in 2020. So much for preserving the status quo!

So if you think passing motion 29 will settle the issue you are wrong and your decision to pass motion 29 will come back to haunt you in just a few years. If you truly don't want the principles of motion 30 to be adopted by the church at any stage because they conflict with the word of God and potentially endanger people's salvation then do not pass motion 29 at any cost.

Instead urge your General Synod reps to vote against both motion 29 and 30. Encourage the consideration of alternative structural arrangements that genuinely protect our integrity and consider the possibility of a Doctrine Tribunal.

Yours in His service

Archdeacon Tim Mora